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ABSTRACT

In considering the question of whether education leads to better and more supportive human beings, a survey was conducted on how formal education and demographic variables, such as age, gender, and degree of urbanization, influence helping behavior and social attitudes. Data were collected from 588 Austrians, ages 14 to 89. Results of the survey indicated that formal education increased progressivism, while decreasing chauvinism and social responsibility. Helping behavior was weakly associated with formal education but strongly associated with age. One explanation of these results is that progressive people often represent a liberal way of thinking in which individuals take care of their own lives. In respect to social attitudes, the survey showed that older people are less progressive, more chauvinistic, and show more social responsibility than younger people, possibly attributable to the expected or given social, health, or financial handicaps or related fears. The present study also reports that men showed higher social responsibility attitudes than women. It suggests that future research consider why social attitudes only lead to helping behavior when certain combinations of attitudes are given. (Contains 2 tables and 14 references.) (JDM)

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Running head: FORMAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

The Influence of Formal Education on Social Attitudes and Helping Behavior

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Abstract

In this article it is examined whether formal education and other demographic variables (age, gender, and degree of urbanization) have an influence on helping behavior (spending money and time for others) and on social attitudes (progressivism, chauvinism, and social responsibility). Data from 588 Austrians of ages 14 to 89 were analyzed with multivariate analysis of variance. Results indicate that formal education increases progressivism, and decreases chauvinism and social responsibility. Helping behavior is weakly influenced by formal education, but strongly from age. Within discussions attention is drawn to mediating variables (like liberality, belief about one´s own social contributions, social handicaps, and expectations about social norms) in explaining the relationship between social attitudes and behavior.

The Influence of Formal Education on Social Attitudes and Helping Behavior

Does education make us to better, more social supportive human beings? Ross and Van Willigen (1997, p. 278) stated that there is some evidence indicating that well educated people have a higher level of social support, but that up to now only few studies have examined the association between education and social support. A lack and an inconsistency of evidence on formal education effects is also confirmed by Anderson, Cooper, and Okamura (1997, p. 298) in relation to social attitudes.

For example, Bierhoff (1993) reported that helping behavior toward other people is more often shown in areas with low urbanization than in large cities, irrespective of the formal education of people. Kaplan and Worm (1993) found in a small sample of adolescents no significant correlations between knowledge (as a result of education) and social attitudes scores. Wagner and Zick (1995) discovered no empirical support for the hypothesis that the differences in social attitude responses between respondents with more or less education respectively is nothing but the result of different tendencies to follow a social norm. They concluded that future research on social-psychological differences associated with education should look especially at combining variables and at interactions of causes. Cheung and Kwok (1996) identified a significant influence of formal education, but not of age, gender, and other demographic variables on progressivism (i.e., anti-conservative orientation) as one type of social-related attitudes within a sample of university students. Kite and Whitley (1996) found gender as an important variable in social attitudes: Men tend to have more negative social attitudes because men adhere more rigidly to social roles than women do. Timpone (1998) discovered small effects of education and age on social connectedness.

In consideration of these research findings the presented article tries to answer the following questions: 1) Is there a relationship between social attitudes and helping behavior? As social attitudes, progressivism (in respect to Cheung & Kwok, 1996) and, as extension, two other important social attitudes (chauvinism and social responsibility) are included in the study. 2) Do formal

education in combination/interaction with other demographic variables influence social attitudes and helping behavior? Demographic variables, such as age, gender, and degree of urbanization are considered.

Method

Participants

588 persons (346 females and 242 males) from Austria volunteered to participate. The age of the persons included in the study ranges from 14 to 89 years (mean age = 35.6 years). About 30 percent of the investigated population lives in villages and cities with less than 5000 inhabitants, about 40 percent in villages with more than 150000 inhabitants. Persons were selected by randomly asking via telephone and on street for participation in the study.

Procedure and Materials

The participants of the study had to complete a questionnaire in about a 20 minutes session at home and to return it after one week. In the questionnaire participants were instructed about the general aims of the study and that they should quickly answer the questions. Only about one third of the questionnaires' contents are used in this study, the other contents concern variables which are not relevant for the given study (e.g., knowledge about historical developments).

Independent variables were formal education, age, gender, and degree of urbanization. Dependent variables were helping behavior and the attitudes of progressivism, of chauvinism, and of social responsibility. As control variable social desirability was measured.

Formal education was measured with one question asking people about their highest successfully completed formal education (i.e., primary school [= low education, 37 percent of participants]; vocational training school and technical school [= medium education, 45 percent of participants]; professional or general high school and university [= high education, 18 percent of participants]). People were also asked with one question about their age and their gender. For the measurement of the degree of urbanization people had to state the number of inhabitants within the village or city they live.

Two questions were presented for measuring helping behavior. First, participants were asked about the average sum of money they give every month for social purposes (e.g., charity). Second, they had to state the average hours per month spent with social activities (e.g., social welfare work). Answers of both questions correlate with $r = 0.33$ ($p \leq 0.000$). Because both indicators of helping behavior had a high percentage of spending no money at all (49.8 percent) and doing no social activities at all (72.8 percent), both indicators were dichotomized and summarized. The resulting variable has three values: spending and doing nothing (= low helping behavior, $n = 256$), spending *or* doing something (= medium helping behavior, $n = 209$), and spending *and* doing something (high helping behavior, $n = 123$).

Progressivism was measured with a 40-items-scale from Schneider & Minkmar (1972) whereby about 10 items were adapted to actual developments in our society. Within this scale participants had to answer if they agree or do not agree with computer music, with divorce, with striptease, with socialism, and with other social, economic, political, religious, and cultural traditions, and actual or future developments. The changed scale showed acceptable reliability (*Cronbach´s Alpha* = 0.76).

13 items of an actualized and adapted scale from Liebhart & Liebhart (1971) were used to measure chauvinism (*Cronbach´s Alpha* = 0.86). Within this scale people had to accept or not accept statements about attitudes to nationality, ethical minorities, and guidelines for national and international behavior (e.g., "Jews are not different people, they have much in common with our nation").

Social responsibility was measured with a 10-items-scale (*Cronbach´s Alpha* = 0.71). All items were constructed by the authors of the study and concerned the attitude whether individuals themselves should take care of their social problems or whether others (governmental or non-governmental organizations, etc.) are responsible for social problem solving (e.g., "In our country we all should care about like in a big family"). A factor-analysis of this scale for construct validation showed an one-factor solution with acceptable *factor loadings* (> 0.50) and *communalities* (> 0.20) ($R^2 = 0.28$).

The control variable social desirability was measured with seven items (*Cronbach´s Alpha* = 0.76) from a scale presented by Dickenberger, Holtz, & Gniech (1977). Social desirability correlated significantly with helping behavior ($r = 0.12, p \leq 0.05$) and progressivism ($r = -0.09, p \leq 0.05$), correlations with chauvinism ($r = -0.07$) and with social responsibility ($r = 0.03$) did not reach statistical significance. Significant correlations indicated that people with a high tendency to social desirability also stated a high level of helping behavior, but a low level of progressivism. All the correlations with social desirability indicated some, but little influence of social desirability on participants' answers concerning helping behavior and social attitudes. For example, the largest correlation of $r = 0.12$ indicate that 1.4 percent of helping behavior´s variance (R^2) is explained by social desirability.

Results

In Table 1 the correlations between social attitudes and helping behavior are depicted. Social responsibility and progressivism do not significantly correlate with helping behavior. The negative correlation coefficients indicate that in tendency high progressive people show less helping behavior than low progressive people, and that people with high social responsibility show less helping behavior than people with low social responsibility. The significant correlation of helping behavior and chauvinism ($r = -0.12, p \leq 0.05$) indicates that less chauvinistic people are more social supportive. All social attitudes variables correlate significantly with each other ($-0.53 \leq r \leq 0.61, p \leq 0.05$). The correlations indicate that highly progressive people are less chauvinistic and less social responsible (in their own view). It also indicates that highly chauvinistic people see themselves also as highly social responsible.

Table 1
Intercorrelations between Social Attitudes and Helping Behavior

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Helping Behavior	--	-0.05	-0.12*	-0.08
2. Progressivism		--	-0.49*	-0.53*
3. Chauvinism			--	0.61*
4. Social Responsibility				--

Note. *$p \leq 0.05$

Within Table 2 the influence of formal education, gender, age, and degree of urbanization on social attitudes and helping behavior is depicted. As some of the dependent and independent variables are correlated, a multivariate analysis of variance was computed (Harris, 1993).

Table 2
The Significant Influence of Formal Education, Gender, Age, and Degree of Urbanization on Social Attitudes and Helping Behavior

MANOVA
Multivariate Tests of Significance

Source	*Lambda*	*F*	*df*	*p*	*ES*
Age + Degree of Urbanization	0.76	12.95	8, 708	0.000	0.13
Formal Education *Gender	0.98	0.78	8, 708	0.625	0.01
Gender	0.97	2.40	4, 354	0.050	0.03
Formal Education	0.88	6.12	8, 708	0.000	0.07

Univariate Tests of Significance

Source	*F*	*p*	Independent Variables	*Beta* or *Mean* Rel.	*t*	*p*	R^2
Helping Behavior	19.08	0.000	Age	0.32	6.13	0.000	0.10
	2.42	0.090	Formal Education	low< med< high			0.01
Progressi-vism	32.75	0.000	Age	-0.36	-7.23	0.000	0.13
			Urbanization	0.17	3.52	0.000	0.03
	4.87	0.008	Formal Education	low< med< high			0.03
Chauvinism	5.00	0.007	Age	0.16	3.13	0.002	0.03
	23.95	0.000	Formal Education	low> med> high			0.12
Social Responsibi-lity	11.34	0.000	Age	0.22	4.28	0.000	0.05
			Urbanization	-0.10	-2.03	0.044	0.01
	4.57	0.033	Gender	mal> femal			0.01
	9.53	0.000	Formal Education	low> med> high			0.05

Multivariate tests of significance show that the quantitative variables age and degree of urbanization ($p \leq 0.000$), gender ($p \leq 0.05$), and formal education ($p \leq 0.000$) are significantly influencing the dependent variables. Univariate tests of significance indicate that the older people are, the more helping

behavior they show ($F = 19.08$, $p \leq 0.000$). Also higher educated people show more helping behavior than lower educated people ($F = 2.42$, $p \leq 0.090$). In respect to progressivism, it is found that older people are less progressive and that people living in an area of high urbanization are more progressive ($F = 32.75$, $p \leq 0.000$). Also, people with higher education are more progressive than people with lower education ($F = 4.87$, $p \leq 0.008$). Concerning chauvinism, it is found that older people (in comparison with younger people) and less educated people (in comparison with higher educated people) are more chauvinistic ($F = 5.00$, $p \leq 0.007$; $F = 23.95$, $p \leq 0.000$). Final results show that increasing age increases, and increasing degree of urbanization decreases social responsibility ($F = 11.34$, $p \leq 0.000$). Also, men show higher social responsibility than women ($F = 4.57$, $p \leq 0.033$), and low educated people show higher social responsibility than higher educated people ($F = 9.53$, $p \leq 0.000$).

Discussion

First, the measured social attitudes variables did highly correlate with each other, but - except chauvinism - not with helping behavior. According to our findings, highly progressive people are less chauvinistic, but also show less social responsibility. The negative correlation coefficient between progressivism and social responsibility and helping behavior can be explained with the fact that progressive people often are representatives of a liberal way of thinking in which the individual itself and not others should take care about individual's life.

In respect to the (not statistical significant) negative correlation between social responsibility and helping behavior there might be a tendency in people showing that believing of social support or responsibility to be important does reduce concrete social supportive actions (e.g., "I have a good attitude, so I´m a good guy. I don´t need good actions to be a good guy").

The positive correlation between chauvinism and social responsibility means that highly chauvinistic people believe that people have to be highly responsible for each other. The negative correlation between chauvinism and helping behavior indicates that highly chauvinistic people do not help other

people. Considering both results shows that highly chauvinistic people say that people should help each other, but they personally do not help other people. One explanation for this result might be that chauvinistic people are overrepresented in social-handicapped groups. Such groups need the help of others, therefore they show high values in social responsibility, but such groups do not dispose of material and other resources (available time, creative ideas, influential social networks, etc.) for supporting others, therefore they show low values in helping behavior.

Second, formal education does influence social attitudes, but scarcely helping behavior. Formal education makes people more progressive, less chauvinistic, and reduces their social responsibility (R^2 = 0.03; 0.12; 0.05). It slightly increases the helping behavior of people (R^2 = 0.01). Helping behavior is more strongly influenced by the age of people (R^2 = 0.10). Older people support others more than younger people, perhaps because they expect to need help from others in the near future due to diseases, because of religious attitudes (e.g., collecting good deeds for the other world), or because they dispose of more money than younger people. In respect to social attitudes, older people are less progressive, more chauvinistic, and show more social responsibility than younger people what can be explained by expected or given handicaps and related fear.

The degree of urbanization in relation to social attitudes shows that people from large cities are more progressive and feel less social responsibility than people from smaller villages what replicates existing findings (e.g., Bierhoff, 1993).

In the presented study, men show higher social responsibility attitudes than women. This result is different from other findings (e.g., Kite & Whitley, 1996). A possible explanation might be that men experience higher demands (as stereotypes) from society to help others than women. Social activities of women (as stereotypes) are mainly focussed on supporting the own family and not other parts of the society. Men are also expected to be active outside the family and to take care of friends, firms, clubs, etc.

The presented study should above all draw attention to the many variables mediating the influence of formal education on social attitude and helping behavior. Except the investigated variables (of progressivism, etc.), such variables which can be found in the interpretations of the found results, are: the attitude of liberality, the belief in one´s own social contributions (in comparison with real social actions), the degree of social, health, or financial handicaps and related fears, and finally, expectations about social (stereotypic) roles.

These mediating variables might also be the reason why social attitudes and social behavior were not correlated significantly. Social attitudes only lead to helping behavior, when certain combinations of attitudes are given. Such combinations of social attitudes, for example, high social responsibility, high own handicaps, and high expectations about social roles, have to be tested in future research.

In further studies also, for example, income, disposable time for social activities, personal relevance, or the closeness of relationship between the donor and the recipient should also be considered as control variables (Li, 1997; Liberman & Chaiken, 1996). Of course, further mediating variables are only helpful when researchers will build more complex theories about formal education and its consequences in individual life and in society.

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